

BOOK REVIEW

## Book Review Paradox Lost: Midnight in the Battleground of Sleep and Dreams

Paradox Lost: Midnight in the Battleground of Sleep and Dreams

by Carlos H. Schenk, M.D., Extreme Nights, LLC, 2005

Kenneth R. Casey M.D., M.P.H.

*Sleep Disorders Center, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM*

*J Clin Sleep Med 2005;3(5):543.*

This is a remarkable book, which is difficult to characterize in terms of both its attributes and its audience. There is a companion DVD which consists of recorded interviews of several of the patient's discussed in the book. From the standpoint of a reviewer accustomed to the rigors of evidence-based medicine, the package is refreshing but slightly disappointing. However, to a student-trainee with a nascent interest in sleep medicine, it may well be stimulating or even inspiring.

Befitting a book whose title represents a play on words referring to John Milton, the text is highlighted by literary quotes ranging from Cervantes to Saint Exupéry. There is a modest amount of space devoted to descriptions of various parasomnias in a standard clinical style; however this information is now available from other easily accessible resources. The bulk of the narrative consists of descriptions of the experiences of patients with parasomnia syndromes and the interaction these patients enjoyed with clinician-scientists who are both caring and curious—a combination of traits uniquely conducive to the discovery of new syndromes. The devastating toll of these syndromes on the quality of life of sufferers is illuminated by personal and rather intimate accounts in both the book and the accompanying DVD. Most especially, the remarkable dedication and love required of family members of parasomnia patients, who learn to live with embarrassment, sleep disruption, and physical danger, is touchingly recounted.

There is a degree of redundancy in the patients' stories, and there is a temptation for the reader to skip ahead. But this is not a textbook. Each story presents a unique variation of the theme. I understand the author's desire to include these subtleties in presentation and expression. After all, each patient is unique: how could one choose to present one and not another? This is not only the tale of a family member's dedication and commitment to a loved one but is also the tale of a physician's love for his patients and his profession.

As a practicing sleep physician, I doubt that my sensitivity to the travails of these remarkable patients or my ability to diagnose

their problems has significantly changed consequent to reading this book. One possible exception is related to the discussion of nocturnal eating disorders, which I now appreciate to be more common than I previously recognized. In addition, there is a useful and reasonably comprehensive bibliography.

On the other hand, for someone relatively unfamiliar with the myriad manifestations of parasomnia this book presents the "feel" of diagnosis and management of these conditions and the disordered nervous system they reflect, not on a sterile, scientific basis but as an experiential, even emotional, revelation.

---

Address correspondence to: Kenneth R. Casey MD, MPH, Associate Professor of Medicine, University of New Mexico, Sleep Disorders Center, 1101 Medical Arts Avenue NE, Albuquerque, NM 87102; Tel: (505) 272-6110; Fax: (505) 272-6112; E-mail: kcasey@salud.unm.edu